

Message Text

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AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMCONSUL MUNICH

AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USLO PEKING

AMEMBASSY PRAGUE

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AMEMBASSY SOFIA

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

AMEMBASSY WARSAW

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 15536

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, UR, CH

SUBJECT: SOVIETS PRESENT SMILING FACE TO POST-MAO CHINA

1. SUMMARY. MOSCOW'S FIRST COMMENTARY ON CHINA SINCE THE
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DEATH OF MAO OMITTS ANY MENTION OF THE CHAIRMAN'S NAME AND

RESTATES THE SOFT SIDE OF THE SOVIET POSITION IN IMPROVING RELATIONS WITH THE PRC. THE TONE AND CONTENT OF THE ARTICLE, OVER THE AUTHORITATIVE PSEUDONYM " I. ALEKSANDROV," ARE CONCILIATORY, AND SOME OF THE DETAILS ARE NEW. IT APPEARS TO BE A TRANSPARENT ATTEMPT TO APPEAL TO THE POST-MAO LEADERSHIP IN CHINA TO BURY THE HATCHET WITH MAO. BUT ON SPECIFIC QUESTIONS, IT DOES NOT HINT OF NEW SOVIET INITIATIVES TO RESOLVE THE LONG-STANDING FEUD, NOR DOES IT IMPLY WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT ANY OF PEKING'S POSITIONS. SINCE SOVIET OBSERVERS HAVE INDICATED PRIVATELY THAT THEY DO NOT EXPECT ANY NEW LEADER IN PEKING TO BE STRONG ENOUGH TO IMPROVE SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS FOR MANY MONTHS OR YEARS, WE VIEW THE ARTICLE AS THE MOST RECENT IN A LONG SERIES OF TACTICAL GESTURES INTENDED TO SHOW THE CORRECTNESS OF MOSCOW'S POSITION AND IMPLICITLY TO BLAME CHINA FOR THE LACK OF PROGRESS IN IMPROVING RELATIONS. IT MAY ALSO BE INTENDED TO WORRY WASHINGTON THAT MOSCOW COULD BUILD OUT A TRIANGLE OF ITS OWN. END SUMMARY.

2. PRAVDA (OCT 1) CARRIES THE TEXT OF THE SOVIET MESSAGE TO PEKING ON THE 27TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PRC, AND A MAJOR COMMENTARY PEGGED TO THE ANNIVERSARY. THE MESSAGE (ASSUME DEPT AND OTHER ADDRESSEES HAVE TEXTS OF BOTH ITEMS) WAS SENT IN THE NAME OF THE SOVIET COUNCIL OF MINISTERS AND THE SUPREME SOVIET TO THEIR CHINESE COUNTERPARTS WITHOUT NAMES, AS ALWAYS IN THE PAST DECADE. IT IS STANDARD IN FORM, BUT marginally WARMER THAN LAST YEAR'S MESSAGE, ADDING A FINAL LINE WISHING THE CHINESE PEOPLE "WELL-BEING AND SUCCESS."

3. PRAVDA'S ALEKSANDROV ARTICLE (ALSO OCT 1). IS THE FIRST SOVIET COMMENTARY ON CHINA SINCE THE DEATH OF MAO. (A FEW IMPLICITLY CRITICAL PRESS ITEMS HAVE APPEARED, BUT THEY HAVE BEEN NOTABLY FEW.) THE TONE OF THE ALEKSANDROV ARTICLE IS SIMILAR TO THAT BY THE SAME AUTHOR ON APRIL 28, 1976, IN PRESENTING THE SOVIET POSITION IN CONCILIATORY TERMS(MOSCOW 6707). BUT IS HAS SEVERAL SIGNIFICANT FEATURES, SOME OF WHICH ARE NEW AT LEAST IN TERMS OF SOVIET COMMENTARY IN RECENT

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YEARS, AND THESE SET IT APART FROM PREVIOUS SOVIET COMMENTARY:

-- IT DOES NOT MENTION MAO OR MAOISM AT ALL--
NO SMALL FEAT IN A DISCUSSION OF THE 20TH CENTURY HISTORY OF THE CHINESE STATE AND PARTY. THE ONLY CHINESE MENTIONED BY NAME IS SUN YAT-SEN, WHOM THE SOVIETS HAVE PREVIOUSLY PRAISED (SEE 75 MOSCOW 1469

(NOTAL). THE GENERAL POINT SEEMS TO BE THAT SINCE MAO WAS THE MAIN OBSTACLE TO BETTER SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS (IN SOVIET EYES), HIS PASSING OPENS THE POSSIBILITY OF IMPROVED RELATIONS. A MORE SUBTLE POINT MAY BE THAT THE SOVIETS BELIEVE THAT SUN, RATHER THAN MAO (LIKE LENIN INSTEAD OF STALIN), SHOULD BE ACCEPTED AS THE TRUE FATHER OF THE CHINESE REVOLUTION.

-- THE ARTICLE DOES NOT CRITICIZE PRC POLICIES OR PRACTICES IN EITHER DOMESTIC OR FOREIGN AFFAIRS.

-- IT STATES THAT THE SOVIETS ARE WILLING TO REAFFIRM THE SINO-SOVIET TREATY OF 1950.

-- IT RECALLS SOVIET SUPPORT FOR CHINESE "INITIATIVES" (IN THE 50'S) TO ESTABLISH A "ZONE OF PEACE IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC OCEAN," AND TO SIGN A "PACT ON SECURITY BETWEEN THE COUNTRIES OF ASIA WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF THE USA."

IN A MORE FAMILIAR VEIN,

-- IT REITERATES THAT SOVIET PROPOSALS TABLED SINCE KHRUSHCHEV'S FALL IN 1964 (E.G., ON SUMMIT MEETINGS, NON-USE OF FORCE AND OTHERS) REMAIN ON THE TABLE.

-- AMONG THOSE, IT RECALLS SOVIET PROPOSALS TO INCREASE TRADE AND OTHER EXCHANGES (ACADEMIES OF SCIENCE, "HEALTH, SPORTS, TOURISM, ETC.")

-- IN A RESTATEMENT OF A STANDARD POSITION, IT SAYS THAT MOSCOW IS READY TO HOLD "CONCRETE NEGOTIA-CONFIDENTIAL

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TIONS" ON THE BORDER QUESTION," WITHOUT ANY PRE-CONDITIONS," AND REITERATES THAT MOSCOW HAS "NO ECONOMIC, TERRITORIAL OR OTHER CLAIMS AGAINST THE PRC."

-- IT CITES THOSE PORTIONS OF BREZHNEV' 25TH PARTY CONGRESS SPEECH CALLING FOR THE NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS BASED ON "THE PRINCIPLES OF PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE," OMITTS BREZHNEV'S POINTS WHICH DEMAND VIRTUAL SURRENDER AND CONCLUDES THAT THE TWO SIDES HAVE "NO PROBLEMS" WHICH CANNOT BE RESOLVED "IN THE SPIRIT OF GOOD NEIGHBORLINESS, OF MUTUAL ADVANTAGE AND OF MEETING THE INTERESTS OF EACH OTHER."

4. THE ARTICLE IS CLEARLY THE MOST CONCILIATORY

SOVIET PUBLIC PRONOUNCEMENT ON CHINA IN MANY YEARS, AND THE IMPORTANCE OF ITS POSITIVE TONE SHOULD NOT BE MINIMIZED. THE RESTRAINT IN NEGATIVE REFERENCES IN SUCH AN ARTICLE IS UNPRECEDENTED IN RECENT TIMES. BUT ON ISSUES OF SUBSTANCE, NOTABLY A RESOLUTION OF THE BORDER DISPUTE, ALEKSANDROV'S TERMINOLOGY REPRESENTS NO CHANGE FROM THE BASIC SOVIET POSITION; TALKS "WITHOUT PRECONDITIONS" MEANS THAT MOSCOW DOES NOT ACCEPT PEKING'S INSISTENCE THAT TROOPS FROM BOTH SIDES BE WITHDRAWN FROM "DISPUTED TERRITORIES," (WHICH THE CHINESE CLAIM KOSYGIN AGREED TO IN HIS SEPT 1969 PEKING AIRPORT MEETING WITH CHOU EN-LAI) BEFORE THE BORDER ISSUE CAN BE SETTLED. FURTHERMORE, SOVIET SINOLOGISTS AND OTHERS HAVE SAID REPEATEDLY BEFORE AND SINCE MAO'S DEATH, THAT THEY EXPECT NO SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN CHINA' FOREIGN POLICY FOR SEVERAL MONTHS OR YEARS, SINCE THEY SEE NO CHINESE LEADER WITH SUFFICIENT AUTHORITY TO DIRECT SUCH A CHANGE.

5. THUS THE ARTICLE, BY OURREADING, IS MAINLY "FOR THE RECORD." IT SAYS, DIRECTLY AND INDIRECTLY, THAT MOSCOW IS NOT TO BLAME FOR THE CONFRONTATION AND SEEKS TO REDUCE IT. THEREFORE, BY IMPLICATION, THE CHINESE ARE TO BLAME, AND WILL CONTINUE TO BE IF THE CONFRONTATION CONTINUES. HAVING RECYCLED THE RECORD FOR POST-MAO CIRCUMSTANCES IN THIS WAY, THE SOVIETS COULD

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NOW RETURN TO SOME FORM OF POLEMICAL EXCHANGE, ESPECIALLY IN VIEW OF THE SHARP ANTI-SOVIET MATERIALS COMING FROM PEKING. BUT EVEN THAT WOULD NOT ERASE THIS RECORD OF MOSCOW'S CONCILIATORY POSTURE--THIS EFFORT TO CLEAN ITS SKIRTS PUBLICLY--IN CASE ANYONE IN PEKING IS LISTENING. SIMILARLY, THE ARTICLE MAY BE INTENDED TO WORRY THOSE IN WASHINGTON WHO THINK THAT MOSCOW MAY BE ABLE TO DEVELOP A TRIANGLE OF ITS OWN, HOWEVER LOPSIDED, BY ADDING A PEKING CORNER.

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